



# DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

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## WCC EDUCATORS MEET IN EAST BERLIN

EAST BERLIN, G.D.R. -- The Rev. David W. Perry, National Coordinator of the Office of Christian Education at the Episcopal Church Center, was one of eight leaders from around the world who attended a World Council of Churches Secretaries conference held in East Germany at the invitation of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic. Father Perry was the proxy for Ms. Emily Gibbes, Executive of the Division of Education for Ministry at the National Council of Churches.

Participants in the conference were the World Council of Churches' Regional Education Secretaries. Staff members of the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation and members of the Federation of Protestant Churches Commission on Church Work with Children and Confirmation Candidates also attended.

In an opening address, the educators heard the Prime Bishop of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the G DR, Bishop Albrecht Schonherr, describe the Regional Secretaries' visit and conference as a high point in the GDR Protestant Churches' participation in the International Year of the Child. He spoke of the constant need for the Church, in all its efforts, to place greater emphasis on the question of the role of the children of the congregation in the Church and in society, both in its basic theological work and its practical work.

The Rev. Eckart Schwerin, Regional Secretary for Eastern Europe, in a recently released report on the conference, said the Secretaries were able to meet with members of the Commission on church work with children and confirmation candidates at the Evangelical Seminary in Wittenberg. "The comprehensive program that had been organized for them," he said, "gave them a fuller understanding of the main problems and the form of work being done in the congregations, especially with children and young people."





He said the Secretaries "were particularly struck by the commitment shown by individual Christians, as well as congregations with their auxiliary and full time workers, in their efforts to reflect on what it means to be a Christian in the socialist society of the GDR and to live it out, sharing actively and responsibly in the life of the society."

Father Perry visited congregations in the Görlitz area near the Polish-GDR border and there participated in children's festivals, worship services and discussions with members of congregations of all ages.

In the tiny village of Weinhubel, Father Perry spent an evening in conversation with adults and young people in the parish. "The young people sang 'Go Down Moses' for me," he said. "Our discussion was challenging, The problems they raised were familiar -- being parents, teenagers and the church, the needs of children, how to nurture people in the faith, the problem of many people not coming to church, so the church must reach out."

Pastor Schwerin reported: "Because of the basically Marxist-Leninist orientation of the GDR, the Church is involved in a constant process of reflection and reappraisal in which it is constantly obliged to reascertain its mission and the actual place and orientation of its mission. Another part of this process was the quest for common social objectives, but also the willingness to accept and live with the basic conflicts arising at certain points from the essential contradictions between Marxism-Leninism and the Christian faith.

"This was very obvious in relation to the situation of children and young people in the Christian community," he said. "The Regional Secretaries said they had observed that many parents were afraid to let their children go on participating in the life of the congregation because of the prejudice to their future prospects. To a certain extent these parents felt helpless in the face of restrictive measures."

Pastor Schwerin said the Regional Secretaries were "surprised by the seriousness with which the Christian community is trying to adjust to the existing situation, seeking and using opportunities for witness and service in a fellowship which embraces all groups and generations within the congregation."





"The Regional Secretaries were agreed," Pastor Schwerin reported, "that the shaping and understanding of Christian life in the present situation in the German Democratic Republic could be a valuable example for many churches in the ecumenical movement."

Pastor Schwerin said "a lasting impression" was made on the Secretaries by the visits to church services and instruction classes. "Perhaps more attention should be paid," he commented, "especially in this International Year of the Child, to the fact that children are not simply an object of church activity; the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be made to come alive to them in their situation. What is more, they themselves have greatly contributed to the understanding and practice of the faith by adults."

In addition to Father Perry and Pastor Schwerin, the other Regional Secretaries were: The Rev. Tosh Arai, Asia; Dr. Maurice Assad, Middle East; the Rev. G. Roy Chapman, Western Europe; the Rev. Clifford Payne, Caribbean; the Rev. Luis F. Reinoso, Latin America; and the Rev. Faigame Tagoilelagi, Pacific.

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#### PICTURE CAPTIONS

# 79330/1      The Rev. David W. Perry, center, National Coordinator of the Office of Christian Education at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, was one of eight leaders from around the world who attended a World Council of Churches conference of Regional Education Secretaries in East Germany. At left is Kirchenrat Reese, a member of the Commission on Church Work with Children and Confirmation Candidates, and Oberkirchenrat Zilz, also a member of the Commission, is at right. The meeting was held in the Great Hall of Luther House in Wittenberg.

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# 79330/2      World Council of Churches Regional Education Secretaries from around the world met in the German Democratic Republic with WCC staff and members of the Commission on Church Work with Children and Confirmation Candidates. The Rev. David W. Perry, National Coordinator of the Office of Christian Education at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, represented North America/Canada. A recently released report of the conference pointed out that the eight Regional Secretaries were "surprised by the seriousness with which the Christian community is trying to adjust to the existing situation, seeking and using opportunities for witness and service in a fellowship which embraces all groups and generations within the congregation."

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